

FILE UNLI

UPI
16 October 1987

BOOK REVIEWS

VEIL: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987, by Bob Woodward (Simon and Schuster, 543 pp., \$21.95)

In 1982 a group of Washington Press Club members touring Italy were invited to the American embassy in Rome for cocktails. Ambassador Maxwell Rabb had also invited American correspondents stationed in Rome and the event drifted easily into Washington reporters and foreign correspondents swapping war stories.

Suddenly the Washington reporters found themselves talking to themselves. Over in one corner, the Rome reporters were clustered around a man who towered over them -- CIA Director William Casey.

Eavesdropping on the impromptu session, Casey was heard giving intriguing and apparently detailed background reports on the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. The Bulgarian assassins, he told the reporters, were the front of a much larger communist terrorist operation that could be traced to the Kremlin.

American newspapers the following week were peppered with reports from Rome quoting anonymous, but highly placed, intelligence sources as saying the Soviets had a hand in the attempted assassination of the pope.

Five years later, Casey is dead and the tales he left behind are being told by Washington Post Editor Bob Woodward in "Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987."

Woodward critics and Casey defenders, led by Casey's widow, Sophia, charge Woodward made up many of the tales he says the CIA director told out of school. Woodward, they insist, could never have entered the Georgetown Hospital room where Casey lay dying and get a bedside confession that he indeed knew of the diversion of profits from U.S. arms sales to Iran to the Nicaraguan Contras.

Woodward closes his book by saying that he asked the CIA director if he knew of the diversion, and got a nod in response. Woodward said he then asked "Why?" and Casey said, "I believed," and then lapsed into sleep.

While by far the most dramatic scene in the book, "Veil" is about much more than whether Casey knew Iranian money went to the Contras. Oliver North has already testified that Casey was the mastermind behind the scheme, so the CIA director's apparent confirmation is no big shock.

Probably more significant is Woodward's revelation that Casey arranged with the Saudi Arabian ambassador in Washington to have a hit squad assassinate Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, the leader of the terrorist Hezbollah faction in Lebanon.

Continued

The scheme failed, but some 80 other people were killed in the explosion. Later, Woodward claims, Casey arranged to pass a \$2 million bribe to Fadlallah, who in return surprisingly kept his promise to call off terrorists acts against Americans.

While Casey is the central character of the book, Woodward interviewed hundreds of people about the CIA during the past eight years and gathered everything in print about the agency during the Reagan years.

The result reads like a book assembled from a massive amount of material dumped into a computer, sorted out and reported in more or less chronological order.

But what spills out is a fascinating tale of a secretive man heading the government's most secret spy agency. Like Woodward's book, 'The Brethren,' on the Supreme Court, which he co-authored with Scott Armstrong, there is a vivid feeling for the inside workings of a government agency where the light of public attention is not supposed to shine.

And as the reporters at the cocktail party in Rome learned, the idea of much of the secret, inside tales coming directly from Casey is an altogether plausible scenario.